

Sermon: Luke 2:21-40  
“What’s In A Name?”

© Kate Heichler; Preached at Christ Church La Plata/Wayside  
Feast of the Holy Name, Year A, Sunday, January 1, 2023

Has anyone ever given you her or his name to use?

To put into a letter of introduction, to drop at a job interview, to get a discount?

Names carry weight – they carry the presence and power of the person.

We don’t make as much of a fuss about naming as they did in Jesus’ day –

It was a ritual connected to circumcision for male babies 8 days old.

Parents brought their first-born sons to the temple, made the requisite sacrifices

and they were given their name. Usually it was a family name, or their father’s

– but in Jesus’ case, an angel had already told his parents what his name would be.

No naming books for them! Jesus, or more properly, Y’shua – evoking the Joshua

of the Hebrew Bible who led the people of Israel into the promised land.

This Y’shua would lead us all into the promised land of eternal life.

And if having an angel name you isn’t enough, Mary and Joseph also encountered

some elders in the temple who saw something in their newborn they couldn’t yet see – holiness, the promise of God contained in a human infant.

Simeon had been watching his whole life, ever since he had sensed God reveal to

him that he would see the Messiah before he died. Since his people had been

waiting for generations for this rescuer to appear, that seems preposterous – but God’s actions often are to our way of thinking.

Simeon believed God, and that day his faith was rewarded.

Even though Jesus was just an infant, the Spirit told Simeon that this was the one.

And if that wasn’t enough, another person there could also see what was in this

baby. Anna, attached to the temple since she was widowed as a young woman,

had the vision to see what others could not: steeped in prayer,

she was able to discern that redemption was coming through this little one.

Y’shua. This name would mean something attached to such a person.

What does it mean for us? Some use it as a curse word;

sometimes we tack it mindlessly onto the end of our prayers.

But this is a name with power. This is a name that early Christians believed one

day every entity in heaven and earth would acknowledge as sovereign.

One day, soon after the Holy Spirit came upon the believers at Pentecost, Peter and John were coming into the temple and a man lame from birth asked them for money. Peter says, "Look at us," and then says, "I have no money, but what I have I give you: in the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk." And the man did! This caused quite a stir in the temple courts, and Peter explains about Jesus, ending with this: *"And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you."*

The next day, Peter and John are arrested and questioned:

*By what power or by what name did you do this?' Peter answers, "... this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead."*

So they command them not to speak Jesus' name or do anything in his name, and they just say, "We cannot keep from speaking of what we seen and heard!"

When we encounter the power in the name of Jesus, we cannot keep silent. Once I arrived at my church in Stamford, Connecticut to find no one there for the 8 o'clock service. So I decided to use the time. We'd had some flooding in the lower level where the offices were, and the computer was up in the sanctuary. I thought I'd take it downstairs. By myself. In high heels. I must have missed a step, for I heard a mighty crash as the CPU fell and I found myself at the bottom of the stairs. I must have flipped as I went, given the way I landed. I knew it was a bad fall. The first words in my mind were, "Come, Lord Jesus. Be here now." I picked myself up, dazed, and walked back up the stairs going, "I'm thinking, I'm walking; I'm thinking, I'm walking. I must be okay." And other than a bump on my head, I was – not even my glasses were broken. And I will never know if I just was okay, or if Jesus came and healed me in that moment – but that's what it felt like. I've learned to invoke his name whenever I feel in danger or have injured myself.

When we speak the name of Jesus, we invoke his presence. And with his presence comes all the power and peace we could ever need – for healing, for security, for words that we need in a given moment. When we speak the name of Jesus, we open doors – doors closed by injustice and oppression, doors locked by despair and depression; doors barred by fear. And when we speak the name of Jesus, we claim our God-given authority over evil, over the powers of darkness.

I've spoken his name in some situations where I realized the only force benefiting was evil. Anytime you feel things are going against you, or you feel tempted beyond your capacity to resist, use his name, invite him:

"Jesus, be here now. In your name, I bind the powers of evil."

We don't need to fear anything when we have Jesus by our side, and when we speak his name, he's here. It's like rubbing a genie's lamp.

So where do you feel you need to speak the name of Jesus, speak faith into a situation, speak power into a situation, speak peace into a situation?

Who around you is in need of healing? Who around you is in need of freeing?

What systems are jammed – whether in your family or workplace or country?

We can speak the name of Jesus into conflicts we cannot control, like wars.

We can speak the name of Jesus into hearts we cannot control, praying to unleash forgiveness or generosity or peacemaking.

We can speak the name of Jesus into the parts of ourselves we cannot control.

Trust in his power that comes along with his name.

That name awakens faith.

And with faith, we can wait like Simeon and Anna for years against all evidence.

With faith, we can trust like Mary and Joseph had to,

realizing their son was special beyond their capacity to comprehend.

With faith we can pray for things that seem impossible –

because with God all things are possible.

To pray in Jesus' name is to pray in his presence.

That means perfect faith is with us.

He gave us his name – use it!

Amen.

Amen.

## Luke 2:22-40

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, the parents of Jesus brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

"Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,  
according to your word;  
for my eyes have seen your salvation,  
which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,  
a light for revelation to the Gentiles  
and for glory to your people Israel."

And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed-- and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.